

FT
MEADE

4CC
92
Copy 1

19
869

In Memoriam

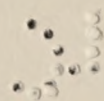
THOMAS WILSON

1832-1902



4CC

92





THOMAS WILSON — 1832-1902

In Memoriam

THOMAS WILSON¹

The inevitable hour has struck for one of our colleagues, the late Thomas Wilson, Curator of the Division of Prehistoric Archeology in the National Museum, and it is fitting that the Anthropological Society of Washington turn aside from its wonted proceedings to pay its respects to his memory, to show its sympathy with his stricken family, and to learn the lesson of this most solemn of human events.

You hear a bell toll in the night, at first with startling resonance, which dies by degrees into mute and eternal silence; a stone is dropped on the smooth surface of a placid lake, and after the sudden splash and the ever-widening and weakening ripples, all is dead calm again. The silence and the calm follow,—and the air and the waters have no memory.

You may have heard it said that the dead are in like manner soon forgotten;—there are the knell, the pall, the bier,—and then oblivion. But this thought is alike hurtful and unjust to the dead as it is to the living. Who among you are able or willing to erase from the intellectual records of the past the thoughts of our own fallen ones? Toner, Seely, Dorsey, Mallery, Pilling, Goode, and Cushing—are not their faces at this moment vividly portrayed on the walls of memory? Their voices we hear again and again like sympathetic music,

And we are filled with wonder how
Or whence it has its springs.

¹ Presented by Dr Otis T. Mason at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of Washington, May 20, 1902.

But it does sound so near,
 We fancy we can almost hear
 The fingers sweep the strings.

And now another comrade has passed out of the world of sense into the world of memory. Recall his stalwart form, his strong face, his pleading voice, his air, his spirit. If any question whatever concerning his science were now to arise, it would not be difficult to guess the side on which he would array himself. And there are as many memories as there are relations in life. Since each stands to each at varying distances and in different light, the individual recollections concerning our friend will be infinitely varied in color and tone. They are like a collection of portraits or photographs of the same person in different dress and at various periods of his life.

But there is another safe depository of the treasures and deeds of those that are dead ; it may be called the institutional memory. Societies are organizations for remembering ; they are the recording angels that keep the books of fate ; they are like the Omniscient mind. It is possible to hold one's tongue, to lay aside one's pen, to fold one's hands, but it is not possible to blot one's name from this book of remembrance. If men have thoughts and utter them ; have messages to deliver and record them ; have searched for treasures or knowledge and found them, then the social mind and memory weigh them, label them, and put them in their treasure house. I will dwell on the thought at this transcendent moment because I am enamored of the life-in-common.

From one point of view it seems to extinguish our individuality. But a single glance at nature exalting each part through the whole teaches the lesson that our only hope of true and lasting influence is through the social keeper of archives. Our dead colleague's family will treasure his domestic virtues ; his friends will not soon forget his abundant hospitality and good cheer ; his fellow citizens are preserving the records of his services to art, education, and the commonweal ; and to us comes the inevitable

function of justly appreciating his thoughts and utterances concerning the natural history of man.

Dr Thomas Wilson died in Washington on May 4, 1902, in the seventieth year of his age. He was born in New Brighton, Beaver county, Pennsylvania, of Quaker parentage. Both on his father's and his mother's side he was of North England race, having in his composition both Scottish blood and predilections. In his career he was an example of American life,—born on a farm, practised in a mechanic's trade, instructed in law, devoted to politics, a soldier, a successful man, a representative of his government abroad, a friend of science.

Dr Wilson was born in sight of a mound and may be said to have grown up in the remotest past. In his subsequent residence at Marietta, Ohio; Troy, Illinois; St Louis, Missouri; Marshall county, Iowa, the remains and relics of ancient American aboriginal life were never out of his sight. From this early training, and after retiring from his profession, he was, in 1881, appointed Consul at Ghent, Belgium, and afterward transferred to Nantes and Nice. In the first named place he was at once in touch with the cave man and the cave bear of the Moustérian epoch. The skeleton of the latter in his hall at the National Museum is a trophy of his enthusiasm. His stay at Nantes brought him into immediate connection with the megalithic monuments at Brittany and the marvelous collection of cave life in the Garonne region at the south. At Nice he was easily in reach of Switzerland, Italy, and southern France. After five years of consular service, Doctor Wilson spent two years traveling over Europe, exploring and studying wherever there was a new prehistoric station to be opened or a collection to be examined. During the official period he was constantly on the lookout for knowledge beneficial to his countrymen. He made exhaustive reports to the State Department on the Treaty of Ghent, the reclaiming of lands in the Netherlands, postal savings institutions, marriage of American girls to citizens of France, and more.

In the entire seven years of residence abroad archeology was his lure. With untiring zeal, accompanied by Mrs Wilson, you saw him exploring caves and cemeteries, measuring the monoliths of Brittany, tramping over Scandinavia and the British Isles, looking down through the glass bottom of his boat upon the remains of Swiss lake cultures, searching for hidden treasures in Etruscan tombs, and all the while taking notes, gathering photographs and publications, and collecting substantial specimens of man's ancient handicraft. At the same time he was mindful always of the archeology of thought as preserved in folklore, his only privately published volume being *Gilles de Retz, or Bluebeard*.

In 1887 Dr Wilson succeeded Dr Charles Rau as Curator of Prehistoric Archeology in our National Museum. Besides the routine of administration, he published monographs, assisted in expositions, and gave public lectures on anthropological subjects. The following is a list of his official papers:

1888. *A Study of Prehistoric Anthropology: Handbook for beginners.* (Annual Report of the U. S. National Museum.)

1888. *Ancient Indian Matting from Petit Anse Island, La.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1888. *Man in North America during the Palæolithic Period.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1888. *Exhibit made by the Department of Prehistoric Anthropology at the Cincinnati Exposition, Cincinnati.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1888. *Circular Relating to Prehistoric Anthropology.*

1890. *Anthropology at the Paris Exposition in 1889.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1891. *Minute Stone Implements from India.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1891. *The Palæolithic Period in the District of Columbia.* (Proceedings, U. S. N. M.)

1894. *The Golden Patera of Rennes.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1894. *The Swastika, the Earliest Known Symbol, and its Migrations.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1895. *The Antiquity of the Red Race in America.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1896. *Prehistoric Art.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

1898. *Arrowpoints, Spearheads, and Knives.* (Report, U. S. N. M.)

We have here the born archeologist, the trained lawyer and special pleader, the consul working for the commonweal, and the graduate of European methods. The creators of this science in Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, whose works we study and admire, were his personal friends, and they honored him with membership in their societies. Among the scientific organizations with which he was associated are the Anthropological Society of Washington (of which he was a vice-president for many years), the American Folk-Lore Society, the Société d' Anthropologie de Paris, the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, the Société d' Anthropologie de Bruxelles, the Société d' Archéologie de Nantes, and the Archeological and Asiatic Association of Nevada, Iowa. He was also a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a member of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion and of the American Oriental Society, a commander of the Order of Isabella of Spain, and an officer of the Order of Leopold.

Dr Wilson was easily the best informed man in our Society on prehistoric and protohistoric Europe, from the rude flints of Thenay, in Loir et Cher, to the relics of Waben, in Pas de Calais; from the Eolithic period to the Merovingian; in the Age of Stone, of Bronze, and of Iron; in Tertiary, Quaternary, and recent times. He knew the vocabulary of technic in each one, and it was delightful to hear him talk about "*le coup de poing*," "*les pointes a main*," and "*racloirs*," about "*pointes en feuille de laurier*," "*burins en silex*," and the rest. He would have been more than human if this foreign training had not dominated and guided all his subsequent opinions and utterances. And so he was, in company with eminent colleagues in both hemispheres, convinced that, but for our ignorance, we should be able in the Western world to look back over the perspective of human history from the crowning elevation of the Twentieth Century to the first monument or relics of humanity.

I should be unfaithful to my duty if I did not extend on my own behalf and for this Society our sympathies to Mrs Wilson, who was the sharer of all her husband's labors and enthusiasm.

Into the outer court of private memories Dr Wilson has passed ; he has ascended the steps of the inner court of civic memories, as man of affairs, patron of art and charity, diplomat, and soldier ; in the holy place of family life are kept burning the recollections of husband, father, brother ; and with bared feet he has stood alone in the holy of holies, as you and I must stand, to make an offering of his life work to the court of last human appeal, the judgment and conscience of organized and trained historic science.



(From the American Anthropologist (N. S.), Vol. 4, April-June, 1902)

The Knickerbocker Press, New York